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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003819

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TAGS: PGOV IZ

SUBJECT: ABDEL AZIZ AL-HAKIM: TIME TO TALK TO IRAN

REF: BAGHDAD 3780 (ADEL ON SPD)

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan Crocker. Reason: 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a November 20 meeting, Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) Chairman Abdel Aziz al-Hakim told the Ambassador that ISCI supports our efforts to bring to rapid closure a bilateral Strategic Partnership Declaration (SPD) that will serve the interests of both nations. Looking fairly strong and healthy after completing cancer treatment in Iran, Hakim said that senior Iranian officials told him Iran is ready for both official and informal talks and real dialogue, not just an exchange of accusations with the USG, and he urged us to engage in such talks "for the service of Iraq." The Ambassador replied that we have said publicly and in private that we are ready to talk, even though Iran's actions are at odds with their claimed support for Iraq's stability. After Hakim and Vice President Adel Mehdi complained about "illegal" detentions of ISCI/Badr cadres and alleged USG support for Shia tribal "Awakening" movements, the Ambassador proposed that we and ISCI conduct frank and detailed discussions to ascertain the facts about these matters. End Summary.

Iran Ready for Real Dialogue

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¶2. (C) Just back from his last course of cancer treatment in Tehran and looking fairly strong and healthy, the black-turbaned Hakim mentioned that he had met with a number of senior Iranian officials, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, who told him they want a dialogue with the USG. The Ambassador replied that we have said publicly and in private that we are also ready for talks. He noted that he had participated several years ago in USG-Iran talks over Afghanistan, but that the good atmosphere surrounding those talks has not been present when the Iranians talk about Iraq. Hakim replied with a laugh that the Iranians had made the exact same observation about the USG and they had complained that, in the Afghanistan talks, they gave much away and got nothing in return. Noting that the Iranians never give anything away, the Ambassador said that Iran claims to share many of our goals about a stable, prospering Iraq at peace with its neighbors. Such an Iraq is in Iran's interests, but Iranian actions are at odds with such statements. Hakim said he detected a new Iranian determination to move forward with real dialogue over practical issues "in the service of Iraq" and they do not want a mere exchange of accusations.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador stated that while we welcome Moqtada al-Sadr's "freeze" of Jaysh al-Mehdi (JAM) operations, the real test is what happens on the ground. In reply to his question about Sadrists direction and links to Iran, Hakim said that JAM activity has decreased, though he has heard JAM still receives a reduced level of Iranian support. He said he has told Iran and others that the way to deal with JAM is by strengthening GOI security and other institutions, and that extremists can be dealt with through dialogue and not the use of force. He said Iran and the U.S. both want

democracy in Iraq and both support the Maliki government. Iran is also providing many economic programs to Iraq, and the USG -- through dialogue with Iran -- has an opportunity to help Iraqis change Iranian views, which would lead to more Iranian support for the Iraqi people.

ISCI Support for SPD

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¶ 14. (C) The Ambassador thanked Hakim and ISCI for support for our SPD efforts, noting that Hakim's stand encouraged Prime Minister Maliki to move forward on the declaration at a critical moment. Flanked by son and ISCI heir apparent Amar, Vice President Adel Abdel Mehdi, and ISCI Deputy CoR Bloc leader Humam Hamoodi, the 57 year-old Hakim stated that Adel had worked since 2004 to achieve a long-term security agreement with the U.S. to serve the interests of both nations and preserve the benefits of much mutual sacrifice. Nodding at CoR leader Hamoodi, Hakim said the next GOI task is to convince the CoR of the benefits for Iraq of a long-term bilateral relationship. The Ambassador said the SPD signing would be followed by one last UNSCR renewal and the start of negotiations over our long-term strategic partnership, noting that we will consult closely with ISCI as we move forward on this process.

Litany of Complaints

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¶ 15. (C) Hakim handed the Ambassador a two-page list of ISCI/Badr cadres who had been detained by MNF-I, alleging that most -- not all -- such detainees had been arrested illegally and on the basis of mere suspicion rather than proof of wrongdoing. The Ambassador stated that we would

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look into each case, and would take appropriate action if we discovered that a detainee was held without sufficient cause. However, in instances in which we are convinced that detainees have engaged in activities that target our troops or other Iraqis, ISCI/Badr will need to consider carefully how to deal with people who commit bad acts in the name of the organization.

¶ 16. (C) VP Adel repeated a complaint he made to the Ambassador during a recent meeting about alleged USG support for Shia tribal "Awakening" movements in southern Iraq (reftel). Since AQI has no presence in the south, Adel asserted, ISCI cannot understand why the USG would support such movements: if JAM is the target, the ISF is already handling the matter. He claimed to have heard that the USG either supports such movements directly or through the GOI intelligence apparatus. The Ambassador replied that after Gen. Petraeus returns to Iraq, the USG and ISCI should form a working group to have a frank discussion about such allegations and look closely at details to determine accuracy.

ISCI Wants Provincial Powers Law

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¶ 17. (C) Hakim stated with evident satisfaction that Iraq was making security progress, and agreed with the Ambassador's observation that the GOI needs to take advantage of improving security to increase services and improve the quality of life in Baghdad and the provinces. Hakim praised the Ambassador for attending last week's Dhi Qar Economic Forum in Nasariyah, as such events show progress and provide hope for a better future to Iraq's people. The Ambassador said he had met recently with the governors of four south-central provinces who all stressed the importance of rapid CoR passage of the Provincial Powers law. Hakim said ISCI shared this view and that he had chided CoR Deputy Speaker Khalid al-Attiya for removing it from CoR consideration last year. He said Khalid told him he would move forward in bringing the bill before the CoR.

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